DENDERA
THE FRENCH-POLISH EXCAVATIONS
First communiqué

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A Polish team joined the French excavations at Dendera in late February and early March 1999, the work being carried out jointly by the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale in Cairo and the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University.[1)]

1) The staff comprised Mr. François Leclere, Mrs. Sylvie Marchand, Prof. Adam Łukaszewicz, Dr. Hanna Szymańska, Dr. Tomasz Scholl, Ms Anna Wodzińska. The IFAO kindly provided accommodations in the French dig house at Dendera.

FRENCH-POLISH EXCAVATIONS IN THE PAST

In October 1996, a Polish-French symposium, organized at the initiative of the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the beginning of French-Polish excavations at Edfu in Upper Egypt, was held in Cairo. Back then, in 1936 through 1939, the excavations were being carried out on the site of the Graeco-Roman town of Apollinopolis Magna. The outcome of three seasons of concentrated effort (unfortunately, interrupted by the outbreak of the second world war) was impressive, in terms of the objects of Old Egyptian art, as well as the documentary evidence, like papyri, ostraca and inscriptions, that were unearthed.

The French side was represented by Prof. Bernard Bruyére, who headed the expedition in 1937, Jean Sainte Fare Garnot and others; on the Polish side there was Prof. Kazimierz Michałowski, who took over from Bruyére for the 1938 and 1939 seasons, papyrologist Prof. Jerzy Manteuffel and anthropologist Dr. Stanisław Żejmo-Żejmis.

While the Edfu site is no longer available for archaeological explorations, the modern city having engulfed it completely, the idea of common excavations has been revived thanks to the cooperation of the directors of the two archaeological institutes – Nicolas Grimal of the IFAO and Michał Gawlikowski of the Polish Center of Archaeology.



*Fig. 1. View of the site
(Photo © A. Łukaszewicz)*

The site that was chosen for the joint explorations is Dendera in Upper Egypt, but not the great temple.[2] It is, as in Edfu, the area within the limits of the ancient town (*Fig. 1*). Proper archaeological work at ancient Tentyris was preceded with a geophysical prospection started in February 1998 (and completed in February 1999) by Tomasz Herbich from the Polish Center, and an archaeological survey carried out in March 1998 by François Leclere and the present author. [3]

THE DENDERA SITE

The area selected for investigation is a big empty space situated to the east of the Hathor precinct. It is covered all over with potsherds and here and there remains of stone and mudbrick structures are visible. In Antiquity, this area had been bisected



Fig. 2. First day of digging. Structures of the First Intermediate Period emerging from the soil (Photo © A. Łukaszewicz)

[2] The temple attracted the interest already of French scholars participating in Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in the fall of 1798. The admiration of those pioneers for the great temple of Hathor was excellently expressed by a French officer, who is quoted as saying: "*Depuis que je suis en Egypte ... j'ai toujours été mélancolique et malade: Tintyra m'a guéri*", cf. V. Denon, in: Sur l'expédition de Bonaparte en Égypte, ed. M. Hussein (Arles 1998), 199.

[3] A brief report of this survey was presented at a meeting of the IFAO Council in Paris, cf. N. Grimal, Rapport sur les travaux de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale en 1997-1998, présenté devant le Conseil scientifique de l'IFAO, le mardi 30 juin 1998, 15.

by a dromos leading from the eastern gate of the Hathor precinct to a smaller temple complex erected east of the great temple. Little remains of this eastern temple. The area in between was part of the ancient urban complex.

The geophysical prospection revealed a considerable destruction and disturbing of the architecture, which was found to lie very close to the surface in this area.
Excavations began in 1999 uncovered in the eastern part of the site a mudbrick structure that was presumably of a domestic nature, possibly a bakery (*Fig. 2*). It dated to the First Intermediate Period. Debris found in the part of the area closer to the Hathor precinct, in a zone densely overgrown with *halfa* grass, was cleared and found to belong to a Roman-period religious structure of the 1st century AD. The stone blocks bear relief decoration and hieroglyphic inscriptions.

The pottery assemblage collected from the surface of the site is widely diverse, ranging from the terminal Old Kingdom to Muslim times. Some ostraca with fragments of Greek texts have also been discovered.

The work is planned to be continued in the coming seasons.